



## THE DIVINE SERVICES OF HOLY AND GREAT WEEK IN THE HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH

As we approach the solemn days of Holy and Great Week, we bring to mind how our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed and seized, tortured and crucified, died and was buried, and arose from the dead. The services of Holy Week, beginning with Lazarus Saturday, give us in symbols, readings and chants the account of our Saviour's love and sacrifice "unto death, even the death of the cross" for our sake (Phil. 2:8) and of His resurrection so that "we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. 6:5).

On Palm Sunday we shall stand with branches in our hands and listen to the "Hosannas," like the multitudes and the children in Jerusalem, welcoming "Him Who cometh in the Name of the Lord," and waving palms and shouting for joy. In the Gospels of the first three days of Holy Week we shall hear Christ's final teachings to His disciples and the people; His stern rebukes to the proud, self-righteous Pharisees and scribes; His prophecy of His resurrection and second coming. In the house of Simon the Leper, where Jesus was having a meal, we shall see the sinful woman enter to anoint His head and feet in love and repentance, and we shall contrast her to Judas, the disciple whose greed incited him to betray his Master for a paltry sum of money. Then we shall follow Jesus to the "upper chamber" where He and His disciples partook of His Mystical Supper, that is, the first celebration of the Eucharist of His Most Holy Body and Blood, and then to the Garden of Gethsemane where our Lord and God, Jesus Christ prayed in agony.

Together with Christ's grieving Mother and John, the beloved disciple, and with the other women, we shall keep watch by His Cross. We shall follow as His Body is carried to the grave in the

garden, and there leave His Body to rest till the glorious morning of the Resurrection.

Through all the mournful services of Holy Week, there runs the strain of bright hope, of forgiveness, of triumph over sin and death, and of our Saviour's victory over Satan, Hades, and mortal corruption.

### LAZARUS SATURDAY

On this Saturday we remember how our Lord Jesus Christ raised His friend Lazarus from the dead. He knew Lazarus was grievously sick, but He waited till he died before He answered Martha and Mary's call for Him. Jesus knew that His own death on the Cross was near. He knew how terrified and bewildered His disciples would be, how they might doubt that He was indeed the Christ. He brought Lazarus back to life after four days, so that His disciples would see that He had power over life and death and was indeed "the Resurrection and the Life."

This miracle occasioned Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem and gave us the certain assurance of the physical resurrection of all the dead.

The *Synaxarion* (i.e., the explanation of each daily feast) narrates the following:

Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary, the friends of the Lord Jesus, had given Him hospitality and served Him many times (Luke 10:38-42; John 12:2-3). They were from Bethany, a village of Judea. This village is situated in the eastern parts by the foothills of the Mount of Olives, about two Roman miles from Jerusalem. When Lazarus—whose name is a Hellenized form of "Eleazar," which means "God has helped"—became ill some days before the saving Passion, his sisters had this report taken to our Saviour, Who was then in Galilee. Nonetheless, He tarried yet two more days until Lazarus died; then He said to His disciples, "Let us go into Judea that I might awake My friend who sleepeth." By this, of course, He meant the deep sleep of death. On arriving at Bethany, He consoled the sisters of

### *Hypakoë. Fourth Tone*

When they who were with Mary came, anticipating the dawn, and found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, they heard from the Angel: Why seek ye among the dead, as though He were mortal man, Him Who abideth in everlasting light? Behold the grave-clothes. Go quickly and proclaim to the world that the Lord is risen, and hath put death to death. For He is the Son of God, Who saveth the race of man.

### *Kontakion. Plagal of Fourth Tone*

Though Thou didst descend into the grave, O Immortal One, yet didst Thou destroy the power of Hades, and didst arise as victor, O Christ God, calling to the myrrh-bearing women, Rejoice, and giving peace unto Thine Apostles, O Thou Who dost grant resurrection to the fallen.

### CHRIST IS RISEN!



work on the day of the Sabbath, they rested for the whole day. But at early dawn on the Sunday that followed, almost thirty-six hours since the death of the Life-giving Redeemer, they came to the sepulchre with the spices to anoint His body. While they were considering the difficulty of rolling away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, there was a fearful earthquake; and an Angel, whose countenance shone like lightning and whose garment was white as snow, rolled away the stone and sat upon it. The guards that were there became as dead from fear and took to flight. The women, however, went into the sepulchre, but did not find the Lord's body. Instead, they saw two other Angels in the form of youths clothed in white, who told them that the Saviour was risen, and they sent forth the women, who ran to proclaim to the disciples these gladsome tidings. Then Peter and John arrived, having learned from Mary Magdalene what had come to pass, and when they entered the tomb, they found only the winding sheets. Therefore, they returned again to the city with joy, as heralds now of the supernatural Resurrection of Christ, Who in truth was seen alive by the disciples on this day on five occasions.

Our Lord, then, was crucified, died, and was buried on Friday, before the setting of the sun, which was the first of His "three days" in the grave; observing the mystical Sabbath, that "seventh day" in which it is said that the Lord "rested from all His works" (Gen. 2:2-3), He passed all of Saturday in the grave; and He arose "while it was yet dark, very early in the morning" on Sunday, the third day, which, according to the Hebrew reckoning, began after sunset on Saturday.

As we celebrate today this joyous Resurrection, we greet and embrace one another in Christ, thereby demonstrating our Saviour's victory over death and corruption, and the destruction of our ancient enmity with God, and His reconciliation toward us, and our inheritance of life everlasting. The feast itself is called Pascha, which is derived from the Hebrew word which means "passover"; because Christ, Who suffered and arose, has made us to pass over from the curse of Adam and slavery to the devil and death unto our primal freedom and blessedness. In addition, this day of this particular week, which is the first of all the rest, is dedicated to the honour of the Lord; in honour and remembrance of the Resurrection, the Apostles transferred to this day the rest from labour that was formerly assigned to the Sabbath of the ancient Law.

Lazarus, who was already four days dead. Jesus groaned in spirit and was troubled at the death of His beloved friend. He asked, "Where have ye laid his body?" and He wept over him. When He drew nigh to the tomb, He commanded that they remove the stone, and He lifted up His eyes, and giving thanks to God the Father, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." And he that had been dead four days came forth immediately, bound hand and foot with the grave clothes, and Jesus said to those standing there, "Loose him, and let him go." This is the supernatural wonder wrought by the Saviour that we celebrate on this day.

According to an ancient tradition, it is said that Lazarus was thirty years old when the Lord raised him; then he lived another thirty years on Cyprus and there reposed in the Lord. It is furthermore related that after he was raised from the dead, he never laughed till the end of his life, but that once only, when he saw someone stealing a clay vessel, he smiled and said, "Clay stealing clay." His grave is situated in the city of Kition, having the inscription: "Lazarus the four-days dead and friend of Christ." In 890 his sacred relics were transferred to Constantinople by Emperor Leo the Wise, at which time undoubtedly the emperor composed his stichera for Vespers, "Wishing to behold the tomb of Lazarus . . ."

The Dismissal Hymn (which is used also on Palm Sunday) and the Kontakion of Lazarus Saturday are as follows:

*The Dismissal Hymn. First Tone*

In confirming the common Resurrection, O Christ God, Thou didst raise up Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion. Wherefore we also, like the children, bearing the symbols of victory, cry to Thee, the Vanquisher of death: Hosanna in the highest; blessed in He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.

*The Kontakion. Second Tone*

To those on the earth, \* the Joy of all, Christ God, the Truth, \* the Light and the Life, \* the Resurrection of the world, \* in His goodness hath now appeared and is

become the true archetype \* of the Resurrection of all, \*  
bestowing divine forgiveness on all men.

## PALM SUNDAY

This day celebrates Christ's triumphal entry into the holy city of Jerusalem. When the people heard of His coming, great crowds rushed to the city gates to meet Him. They spread their cloaks on the road and strewed palm leaves in His path. Children waved green boughs and all sang, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" At Palm Sunday Matins, after the Gospel lection about the entry into Jerusalem, the priest blesses palm leaves or other appropriate branches, which the people hold during the canon. Palm Sunday is one of the twelve great feasts of the Church.

The *Synaxarion* of Palm Sunday gives us this information:

On Sunday, five days before the Passover of the Law, the Lord came from Bethany to Jerusalem. Sending two of His disciples to bring Him a foal of an ass, He sat thereon and entered into the city. When the multitude there heard that Jesus was coming, they straightway took up the branches of palm trees in their hands, and went forth to meet Him. Others spread their garments on the ground, and yet others cut branches from the trees and strewed them in the way that Jesus was to pass; and all of them together, especially the children, went before and after Him, crying out: "Hosanna: Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord, the King of Israel" (John 12:13). This is the radiant and glorious festival of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem that we celebrate today.

The branches of the palm trees symbolize Christ's victory over the devil and death. The word Hosanna means "Save, I pray," or "Save, now." The foal of an ass, and Jesus' sitting thereon, and the fact that this animal was untamed and considered unclean according to the Law, signified the former uncleanness and wildness of the nations, and their subjection thereafter to the holy Law of the Gospel.

God, and the Word was God." This sublime Gospel, heard for the first time by the newly baptized Christians in ancient times, proclaimed that Jesus Christ eternally was God and revealed Himself to the world as God by rising from the dead.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the priest gives to each parishioner a red-colored egg: the symbol of life hidden in the tomb and quickened by the Blood of Christ.

In the afternoon of Pascha, a special Vespers service, called Agape (meaning "love" in Greek), is chanted. The Gospel is read in many languages as a sign that Christ's teaching is to spread to the ends of the earth, in fulfillment of the prophecy from the Book of Psalms, chanted the evening before:

Arise, O God, judge the earth;  
for Thou shalt have an inheritance  
*among all the nations.*

This, too, is why the gift of tongues was given to the Apostles at Holy Pentecost and to the other disciples, says Saint John Chrysostom — so that they might thereby understand that the Gospel was to be proclaimed not to the Jews alone, but to *all* peoples.

The joyous hymns of Pascha are chanted for forty days until the feast of Holy Ascension.

The Synaxarion, Hypakoë, and the Kontakion of Pascha are read in Paschal Matins every day in Renewal (Bright) Week (for this week is considered and treated as one day), and they describe for us the significance of this, the greatest of Christian feast days:

### *The Synaxarion*

Mary Magdalene, and the other women who were present at the burial of our Saviour on Friday evening, returned from Golgotha to the city and prepared fragrant spices and myrrh, so that they might anoint the body of Jesus. On the morrow, because of the law which forbids

Life-creating and Indivisible Trinity, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.” The choir replies, “Amen.” Then the priest begins chanting the Paschal Troparion:

Christ is risen from the dead, by  
death hath He trampled down death,  
and on those in the graves hath He  
bestowed life.

The priest intones the first, second and third verses of the 67th Psalm, “Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Him flee from before His face”, “As smoke vanisheth, so let them vanish; as wax melteth before the fire”, “So let sinners perish at the presence of God, and let the righteous be glad”, and also the verse, “This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad therein” from Psalm 117.

All the while, the church bells are ringing joyously, and the priest and faithful greet one another with the Paschal greeting, “Christ is risen!”, and the response, “Truly He is Risen!” Then the petitions are said, followed by the choir chanting the Paschal Canon, during which the procession re-enters the church. The whole of the Paschal Matins is one song of praise and glory to our risen Lord, a song of joy to “the day of Resurrection. . . . Pascha, the Lord’s Pascha; for Christ God hath brought us from death unto life, and from earth unto Heaven, as we sing the triumphal hymn.”

The Liturgy is particularly majestic and joyful, for the iconostas doors remain open for the whole of Renewal (Bright) Week, thus symbolizing that by His death and resurrection, Christ opened the doors of His Kingdom to all believers. From this day until the day of Pentecost there is no kneeling in church, in order to bear witness to the Resurrection. The Paschal Gospel is not about the Resurrection, but is from the first chapter of the Gospel of Saint John, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with

Together with the Dismissal Hymn “In confirming the common Resurrection, O Christ God. . .”, we chant also the hymns below during this joyous service:

*Another Dismissal Hymn. Fourth Tone*

As by baptism we were buried with Thee, O Christ our God, so by Thy Resurrection we were deemed worthy of immortal life; and praising Thee, we cry: Hosanna in the highest; blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.

*The Hypakoë. Plagal of Second Tone*

Though formerly they praised with branches, afterwards the ungrateful Jews laid hold of Christ God with staves; but ever honoring Him with unchanging faith as our Benefactor, let us continually cry to Him: Blessed is He that cometh to recall Adam.

*Kontakion. Plagal of Second Tone*

Being borne upon a throne in Heaven, and upon a colt on the earth, O Christ God, Thou didst accept the praise of the Angels and the laudation of the children as they cried to Thee: Blessed art Thou Who comest to recall Adam.

The next three days of Holy Week recall Christ’s last teachings to His disciples. These teachings inspire the readings and hymns. The services consist of Great Compline, Matins, Hours, and the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts with Vespers. Gospels are read at Matins and Liturgy. In addition, the whole Psalter is read in the services of these three days of Holy Week, as also are the four Gospels. The Psalms remind us how the coming and sufferings of Christ were awaited and foretold in the Old Testament. The Gospels tell of His life in the world. His teaching and miracles prove that He was indeed the Son of God, Who of His own free

will suffered for our sake though He was without guilt.

At Matins after the great litany we do not hear the usual joyous verses, “God is the Lord, and hath appeared unto us.” Instead, a compunctionate “Alleluia” is chanted. And to inspire us to watch and pray in these solemn days, this troparion is chanted:

Behold, the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night, and blessed is that servant whom He shall find watching; and again unworthy is he whom He shall find heedless. Beware, therefore, O my soul, lest thou be borne down with sleep, lest thou be given up to death, and be shut out from the Kingdom. But rather rouse thyself and cry: Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou, our God; through the Theotokos, have mercy on us.

After the canon, which speaks of Christ’s coming Passion, another special hymn — an Exapostilarion — is chanted. It is a cry of our soul as if it saw from afar Christ’s radiant mansions and feels how unworthy it was to enter them:

Thy bridal chamber, O my Saviour, do I behold all adorned, and a garment I have not that I may enter therein. Illumine the garment of my soul, O Light Bestower, and save me.

### HOLY AND GREAT MONDAY

On Holy and Great Monday the Church tells us the parable of the barren fig tree. It is the symbol of those who think only of outward goodness which does not come from the heart. The Gospel also tells about our Lord Jesus Christ’s prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem, wars and tribulations, and the end of the world.

The *Synaxarion* for Holy and Great Monday has the following edifying account:

The holy Passion of our Saviour begins today, presenting Joseph the

blessed Sabbath whereon Christ, having slept, shall arise on the third day.

### PASCHA

All the doors of the Sanctuary are closed. The church is in darkness. All lamps, candles, and chandeliers are extinguished. Towards midnight there is a short nocturns service, when the canon of Holy and Great Saturday is chanted. Below the *bema* stand the bearers of the icons, crosses and banners, the great Book of the Gospels, the icon of the Resurrection for the procession. All stand silently, holding unlit candles in solemn and joyful anticipation.

The Beautiful Gates open. The priest comes forth from the sanctuary holding a lit candle which—like the “Holy Fire” that is supernaturally ignited in the Tomb of our Saviour in the Church of the Holy Resurrection in Jerusalem—symbolizes the Saviour’s resurrection. The priest, and then all the faithful chant the triumphant hymn:

Come, receive ye light from the Unwaning Light, and glorify Christ, Who is risen from the dead.

The entire church becomes ablaze with light as all light their candles from the flame brought out of the sanctuary, and the priest in radiant vestments comes out chanting:

Angels in the Heavens, O Christ our Saviour,  
praise Thy Resurrection with hymns; deem  
us also who are on earth worthy to glorify  
Thee with a pure heart.

The procession of the clergy and the faithful finally comes out of the church where, in a place prepared, the Gospel of the Resurrection is read (from Mark 16:1-8). Then the priest raises the cross and a censer, and makes the sign of the cross with both, while proclaiming in a loud voice: “Glory to the Holy, Consubstantial,

will be Pascha) the burial hymns of Saturday are mingled with those of the resurrection, so that this service is already full of the coming Paschal joy.

After the Gospel, the Liturgy proceeds as usual. Instead of the Cherubic Hymn, a special Great Entrance Hymn is chanted:

Let all mortal flesh keep silence and stand with fear and trembling, and take no thought for any earthly thing, for the King of kings and Lord of lords cometh to be slain and given as food for the faithful. Before Him go the choirs of the angels with all sovereignty and power: the many-eyed Cherubim and six-winged Seraphim, covering their faces and crying out the hymn: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Later in the Liturgy of Holy and Great Saturday, the beautiful and compunctionate Communion Hymn, based on Psalm 77, is chanted:

The Lord awoke as one that sleepeth,  
and is risen, saving us. Alleluia.

After the Liturgy the faithful take their one meal of the day, and that of strict fasting food, to strengthen them to keep watch the rest of the day and evening. In church the Acts of the Apostles are read aloud. This is the only Saturday of the year on which a strict fast is kept. In the monasteries and convents, the refectory meal is taken in complete silence, out of reverence for the burial of Christ.

The Kontakion of Matins sums up the significance of this solemn day:

*The Kontakion of Holy and Great Saturday  
Plagal of Second Tone*

He that shut up the abyss is seen to be dead, and like a mortal man, the Immortal One is wrapped in linen and myrrh, and placed in a grave. And women came to anoint Him weeping bitterly and crying out: This is the most

all-comely as a prefiguring of Christ. He was the eleventh son of Jacob, and his first son by Rachel; because he was so beloved of his father, his own brethren came to envy him and cast him into a pit. Later they sold him to foreigners for thirty pieces of silver, who later sold him again in Egypt. Because of his virtue, his master gave him much authority in governing his house; because he was fair of countenance, his master's wife sought to draw him into sin with her; because of his chastity, he refused her, and through her slanders was cast into prison. Finally, he was led forth again with great glory and was honoured as a king. He became lord over all Egypt and a provider of wheat for all the people. Through all this, he typifies in himself the betrayal, Passion, death, and glorification of our Lord Jesus Christ (see Gen., chapters 37, 39-41).

To the commemoration of Patriarch Joseph is added also the narration concerning the fig tree, which on this day was cursed and subsequently dried up because of its unfruitfulness. It portrayed the Jewish synagogue, which had not produced the fruit demanded of it—that is, obedience to God and faith in Him—and which was stripped of all spiritual grace by means of the curse (Matt. 21:18-20).

The Kontakion of this day is most instructive:

*The Kontakion. Plagal of Fourth Tone*

Jacob lamented the loss of Joseph, but that noble one was seated in a chariot and honoured as a king; for by not being enslaved then to the pleasures of the Egyptian woman, he was glorified by Him that beholdeth the hearts of men and bestoweth an incurrutable crown.

## HOLY AND GREAT TUESDAY

On Holy and Great Tuesday, we listen to our Saviour's replies to the wily questions of the Pharisees and scribes, who tried to trap Him; we hear His stern rebukes of their envy and deceit. The parables of the Ten Virgins and of the Talents remind us how we should always keep vigilant watch over our conscience and increase in God's service the grace we have received from Him. The Gospel then tells Christ's prophecy of His second coming and the Last

Judgment. It ends with the awful warning: “Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified.”

The *Synaxarion* and the *Kontakion* of this day emphasize the gravity of God’s examination of our life and the account we shall have to give of ourselves:

Today we bring to mind the parable of the ten virgins, which our Saviour related as He was coming to His Passion. This parable teaches us that the accomplishment of the great work of virginity should not make us careless in other matters, especially in almsgiving, where-with the lamp of virginity is made radiant. Furthermore, it teaches us that we should not be remiss about the end of our life, but should be prepared for it at every moment, like the wise virgins, so that we may meet the Bridegroom, lest He come suddenly and the doors of the heavenly bridechamber be shut, and we also, like the foolish virgins, hear that dread sentence: “Amen, I say unto you, I know you not” (Matt. 25:1-13).

*The Kontakion. Second Tone*

Being mindful of the hour of the end, O my soul, and fearing because of the cutting down of the fig tree, labour diligently with the talent that was given thee, O hapless one, and be watchful and cry: Let us not remain outside the bridal chamber of Christ.

HOLY AND GREAT WEDNESDAY

On Holy and Great Wednesday, the Church commemorates the act of contrition and love of the sinful woman who poured the precious myrrh on our Saviour’s head and, though she did not know it, “prepared Him for burial.” In contrast, we hear of the dark act of Judas, whose greed led him to betray his Master. All the readings and hymns of the day warn us to beware of greed and love of money, which even tempted a disciple of Christ. We too betray Him, if we let greed and selfishness get hold of us, while every deed

can carry the Epitaphios into the sanctuary and lay it on the Holy Table. It will lie there until Ascension Eve, as a symbol that Christ appeared among His disciples for forty days after His resurrection. Then, the *Prokeimenon* is chanted, and the glorious prophecy of Ezekiel is read about the dry bones of Israel, out of which arose “an exceeding great host” quickened to life by the breath of God. Then follows Saint Paul’s Epistle about Christ our Passover, and the Gospel about the sealing of Jesus’ tomb. Matins then ends as usual.

The Liturgy of Holy and Great Saturday is that of Saint Basil the Great. It begins with Vespers. After the entrance, the evening hymn “O Joyous Light” is chanted as usual. Then fifteen Old Testament readings are read. They tell of the most striking events and prophecies of the salvation of mankind by the death of the Son of God. The account of creation in Genesis is the first reading. The sixth reading is the story of Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea and Moses’ song of victory over Pharaoh, with its refrain: “For gloriously is He glorified”. The last reading is about the Three Children in the fiery furnace of Babylon, and their song of praise with its repeated refrain: “O praise ye the Lord and supremely exalt Him unto the ages.” In the ancient church the catechumens were baptized during the time of these readings. The Epistle which follows speaks of how, through the death of Christ, we too shall rise to a new life. After the Epistle, instead of an Alleluia, the choir chants, as if it were a call to the sleeping Christ: “Arise, O Lord, judge the earth, for Thou shalt have an inheritance among all the nations....” While this is being chanted the priest scatters bay leaves and flower petals throughout the entire church, as symbolizing the fragrance of life coming forth from the grave. In ancient times it was the custom to scatter flowers in the path of a victorious ruler when he returned in triumph to his city; just so, our Saviour returns triumphant from Hades. The deacon carries out the Book of the Gospels, and reads the first message of the resurrection from Saint Matthew. Because the Vespers portion of the service belongs to the next day (which



in the law of the Lord.” Each verse of the Psalm is followed by a verse of the Lamentations. It is like a long poem depicting the Angels in Heaven and all creatures on earth overwhelmed by the death of their Creator, and their gratitude at being freed from death’s power by Christ. The following are examples of these most compunctionate hymns:

In a grave they laid Thee, O my Life and my Christ;  
and the armies of the angels were sore amazed,  
as they sang the praise of Thy submissive love.

Lo, how fair His beauty! Never man was so fair!  
Yet how doth He seem a dead man bereft of form,  
though all nature’s beauty had Him as its source.

Right it is indeed, Life-bestowing Lord, to magnify Thee;  
for upon the Cross were Thy most pure hands outspread,  
and the strength of our dread foe hast Thou destroyed.

Ev’ry generation chanteth hymns of praise at  
Thy burial, O Christ God.

Lo, myrrh-bearing women to Thy tomb, O Saviour,  
are come, their myrrh to offer.

Grant that we who serve Thee may see the  
Resurrection of thy Son, O blest Virgin.

After the Lamentations, the Resurrection *Evlogitaria* are chanted. Then, following the customary litanies, the choir chants the canon, where the note of joy and triumph is heard more and more clearly. At the end of the Doxology of Matins, the priest raises the Epitaphios, which is then taken by four pall-bearers; the deacon walks in front, the people follow, all carrying candles. The procession walks out of, and around, the church, with the bells tolling and the choir chanting, “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.” This represents the burial procession of Christ. Then, when the procession re-enters the church, the priest and dea-

of humility and love at once brings us near to Him.

Concerning these incidents recorded in the Holy Gospels, the *Synaxarion* has the following account:

Two women—say the more discerning interpreters of the Gospel—anoined the Lord with myrrh; the one, a long time before His Passion; the other, a few days before. One was a harlot and sinner; the other, chaste and virtuous. The Church commemorates this reverent act today. While mentioning herein the person of the harlot, it also mentions Judas’ betrayal; for, according to the account in Matthew, both of these deeds took place two days before the Passover, on Wednesday.

That woman, then, anoined Jesus’ head and feet with very precious myrrh, and wiped them with the tresses of her hair. The disciples, especially the avaricious Judas, were scandalized, supposedly because of the waste of the myrrh, which could be sold for a great price and given to the poor. The Lord Jesus reproved them and told them not to trouble the woman. Indignant, Judas went to the high priests, who were gathered in the court of Caiaphas and were already taking counsel against Jesus. On agreeing with them to betray his Teacher for thirty pieces of silver, Judas sought from that time opportunity to betray Him (Matt. 26:14-16). Because the betrayal took place on Wednesday, we have received the tradition from Apostolic times to fast on Wednesday throughout the year.

It is on this day also that one of the most beautiful and compunctionate hymns ever composed is chanted in the Holy Church. This hymn, composed in the early part of the ninth century by the nun Cassiane, has as its theme the anointing of our Saviour’s feet by the harlot:

#### *The Troparion of Cassiane*

O Lord, the woman who had fallen into many sins perceived Thy divinity, and taking upon herself the duty of a myrrh-bearer, with lamentation she bringeth Thee myrrh-oils before Thine entombment. Woe unto me! saith she, for night is become for me a frenzy of licentiousness, a

dark and moonless love of sin. Receive the fountain of my tears, O Thou Who gatherest into clouds the water of the sea. Incline unto me, unto the sighings of my heart, O Thou Who didst bow the Heavens by Thine ineffable condescension. I will kiss Thine immaculate feet and wipe them again with the tresses of my head; those feet, at whose sound Eve hid herself for fear when she heard Thee walking in Paradise in the cool of the day. As for the multitude of my sins and the depths of Thy judgments, who can search them out, O Saviour of souls, my Saviour? Do not disdain me, Thy handmaiden, O Thou Who art boundless in mercy.

The Kontakion for this day continues the theme of contrition and remorse, and confronts us with our unworthiness before God:

*The Kontakion. Fourth Tone*

Though I have transgressed more than the harlot, O Good One, I have in no wise brought forth streams of tears for Thee; but in silence I supplicate Thee and fall down before Thee, kissing Thine immaculate feet with love, so that, as Master that Thou art, Thou mayest grant me the forgiveness of debts, as I cry to Thee, O Saviour: From the mire of my deeds do Thou deliver me.

On and Great Holy Wednesday night the Orthodox Church administers the Mystery of the Holy Unction for the bodily and spiritual health of the participants. At this Mystery, the oil is consecrated by prayer and the clergy anoint the people.

When this is done, the head priest recites the prayers for the remission of sins, while the clergy hold the open Gospel over the heads of the people.

because, as those enemies of God said, “We suspect that His disciples will come and steal His buried body by night, and then proclaim to the people that His resurrection is true, as that deceiver Himself foretold while He was yet alive; and then the last deception shall be worse than the first.” After they had said these things to Pilate and received his permission, they went and sealed the tomb, and assigned a watch for security, that is, guards from among the soldiers under the supervision of the high priests (Matt. 27:62-66). While commemorating the entombment of the holy Body of our Lord today, we also celebrate His dread descent with His soul, whereby He destroyed the gates and bars of Hades, and made His light to shine where only darkness had reigned (Job 38:17; Esaias 49:9; I Peter 3:18-20); death was put to death, Hades was stripped of all its captives, our first parents and all the righteous who died from the beginning of time ran to Him Whom they had awaited, and the holy angelic orders glorified God for the restoration of our fallen race.

After the Six Psalms and the Great Litany the choir chants “God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us,” and then the following dismissal hymns:

The noble Joseph, taking Thine immaculate Body down from the Tree, and having wrapped It in pure linen and spices, laid It for burial in a new tomb.

When Thou didst descend unto death, O Life Immortal, then didst Thou slay Hades with the lightning of Thy Divinity. And when Thou didst also raise the dead out of the nethermost depths, all the powers in the Heavens cried out: O Life-giver, Christ our God, glory be to Thee.

Unto the myrrh-bearing women did the Angel cry out as he stood by the grave: Myrrh-oils are meet for the dead, but Christ hath proved to be a stranger to corruption.

In the meantime, the priest and deacon cense the Epitaphios, then stand in front of it. The priest and the choir then chant the “Lamentations” with the verses of the 118th Psalm (the seventeenth Kathisma): “Blessed are the blameless in the way, who walk

O Thou Who puttest on light like a garment, when Joseph with Nicodemus took Thee down from the Tree and beheld Thee dead, naked, and unburied, he struck up a compassionate dirge, and with mourning he said: Woe is me, O sweetest Jesus! When but a short while ago the sun beheld Thee hanging upon the Cross, it shrouded itself in darkness, and the earth quaked with fear, and the veil of the Temple was rent asunder. But, behold, now I see Thee willingly submitting to death for my sake. How shall I bury Thee, O my God? Or how shall I wrap Thee with winding sheets? With what hands shall I touch Thine undefiled Body? Or what dirges shall I sing at Thy departure, O Compassionate One? I magnify Thy Passion; I praise Thy Burial and Resurrection, and I cry out: O Lord, glory be to Thee.

Then, after the Lord's Prayer, the dismissal hymns are chanted: "The noble Joseph. . ." and "Unto the myrrh-bearing women. . ." followed by the prayers of dismissal. In some parishes, the ancient practice of celebrating the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on this day is maintained, even as Saint Symeon of Thessalonica describes in his work on the divine services. It should be noted also that the Eighteenth Kathisma of the Holy Psalter is not read, since the Psalter is not used from Great Wednesday until Thomas Sunday.

## HOLY AND GREAT SATURDAY

Holy and Great Saturday is a reverent vigil at the tomb of the Son of God, slain for our sins. By anticipation, the Saturday Matins is held on Friday evening. The *Synaxarion* for this day, which is called the "First Resurrection," narrates the following:

### *The Synaxarion*

On Saturday, the high priests and Pharisees gathered together before Pilate and asked him to have Jesus' tomb sealed until the third day;

## HOLY AND GREAT THURSDAY

The Gospels of Holy and Great Thursday tell how our Saviour and His disciples came to Jerusalem to celebrate His last feast of the Passover, and how He washed their feet. They tell the account of that Mystical Supper when our Lord ordained the Mystery of His Most Holy Body and Blood "for the remission of sins and life everlasting." They speak of Christ's instruction to the Apostles, and how He told them that they would all forsake Him that night; they speak of Peter's rash promise that he would always remain faithful; of Christ's vigil in the garden; of how He was seized and led away to the high priest's court; of the scene in the courtyard; of Peter's three-fold denial and his grief; of the high priest's mocking questions; and of how our Saviour Christ God, wearing the crown of thorns, beaten and insulted by the soldiers, was led before Pilate.

The readings and hymns of Matins dwell on Judas' betrayal, on "the dark night" which settled in his soul. We pray that we may keep ourselves from greed and deceit, and be made pure by partaking of the holy Mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood. The Dismissal Hymn after the "Alleluia" at Matins speaks of this:

### *The Dismissal Hymn. Plagal of Fourth Tone*

When the glorious disciples were enlightened at the washing of the feet, then Judas the ungodly one was stricken and darkened with the love of silver. And unto the lawless judges did he deliver Thee, the righteous Judge. O thou lover of money, behold thou him that for the sake thereof did hang himself; flee from that insatiable soul that dared such things against the Master. O Thou Who art good unto all, Lord, glory be to Thee.

The *Synaxarion* and the Kontakion also reiterate the themes of Christ God's betrayal at the hands of "an incorrigible disciple":

On the evening of this day, which was the eve of the feast of unleavened bread (that is, the Passover), our Redeemer supped with His twelve disciples in the city. He blessed the bread and the wine, and gave us the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist. He washed the feet of the disciples as an example of humility. He said openly that one of them was about to betray Him, and He pointed out the betrayer by revealing that it was he “that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish.” And after Judas had straightway gone forth, Jesus gave the disciples His final and sublime instructions, which are contained in the first Gospel reading of the Holy Passion (John 13:31-18:1, known as the Gospel of the Testament). After this the God-man went forth to the Mount of Olives, and there He began to be sorrowful and in anguish. He went off alone, and bending the knees He prayed fervently. From His great anguish, His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. As soon as He had completed that anguished prayer, lo, Judas came with a multitude of soldiers and a great crowd; on greeting the Teacher guilefully with a kiss, he betrayed Him.

The Lord Jesus was then apprehended and taken prisoner to the high priests Annas and Caiaphas. The disciples were scattered, but Peter, who was more fervent than the others, followed Him even into the court of the high priest, but in the end denied thrice that he was His disciple.

Then our divine Teacher was brought before the lawless Sanhedrin and was interrogated concerning His disciples and His teaching. The high priest adjured Him before God that He tell them whether He was truly the Christ. And having spoken the truth, He was judged guilty of death, supposedly as one who had blasphemed. Then they spat in His face, beat Him, smote Him with the palms of their hands, and mocked Him in every way, throughout the whole night until the morning.

#### *The Kontakion. Second Tone*

Taking the Bread into his hands, the betrayer stretcheth them forth secretly and receiveth the price of Him that, with His own hands, fashioned man. And Judas, the servant and deceiver, remained incorrigible.

On this day the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great is celebrated together with Vespers. Before the Great Entrance, instead of the

Such are the dread and saving sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ commemorated today, and in remembrance of them, we have received the Apostolic commandment that a fast be observed every Friday.

#### *Kontakion. Plagal of Fourth Tone*

Come, let us all praise Him Who was crucified for us; for Mary beheld Him on the Tree, and said: Though Thou endurest the Cross, yet Thou art my Son and my God.

On this day, a day of mourning and strict fasting, the service of the “Royal Hours” is celebrated. At each Hour, beside the psalms, prophecies from the Old Testament, an Epistle, and a Gospel are read about Holy and Great Friday.

The solemn Vespers of Great Friday is chanted in the afternoon at the time of our Lord Jesus’ death. Again all the readings remind us of the suffering Christ and His glory. After the Entrance, lections are read in which the Prophet Esaias speaks of “the Lamb led to the slaughter,” and an Epistle of Saint Paul on the power and wisdom of the Cross; again a Gospel is read describing our Lord’s trial before Pilate, His Crucifixion and burial. Near the end of this reading, the Body of our Saviour is taken down from the Cross and placed in the sanctuary, just as the noble Joseph took our Lord’s body from the Cross and placed it in the grave.

After the usual petitions, “Let us all say. . .,” “Vouchsafe. . .,” “Let us complete. . .,” etc., the choir slowly chants the Aposticha, during which the procession exits from the Sanctuary, with the priest and deacon bearing the Epitaphios (the Winding Sheet), their heads uncovered, preceded by candles and censer. All kneel with head bowed low before the image of our dead Saviour. A bier stands in the middle of the church, with candles lit round it. On it the Epitaphios is laid reverently and censed all round by the priest. The people come up to make a prostration before it and kiss it, while the Aposticha are completed and the following hymns are chanted:

The Synaxarion and the Kontakion of this day sum up the history and the significance of the sacred events that came to pass for our eternal salvation:

When Friday dawned, Christ was sent bound from Caiaphas to Pontius Pilate, who was then Governor of Judea. Pilate interrogated Him in many ways, and once and again acknowledged that He was innocent, but to please the Jews, he later passed the sentence of death against Him. After scourging the Lord of all as though He were a runaway slave, he surrendered Him to be crucified.

Thus the Lord Jesus was handed over to the soldiers, was stripped of His garments, was clothed in a purple robe, was crowned with a wreath of thorns, had a reed placed in His hand as though it were a sceptre, was bowed before in mockery, was spat upon, and was buffeted in the face and on the head. Then they again clothed Him in His own garments, and bearing the cross, He came to Golgotha, a place of condemnation, and there, about the third hour, He was crucified between two thieves. Although both blasphemed Him at the first, the thief at His right hand repented, and said: "Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom," to which our Saviour answered, "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." As He hung upon the Cross, He was blasphemed by those who were passing by, was mocked by the high priests, and by the soldiers was given vinegar to drink mixed with gall. About the ninth hour, He cried out with a loud voice, saying, "It is finished." And the Lamb of God "Which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) expired on the day when the moon was full, and at the hour when, according to the Law, was slain the Passover lamb, which was established as a type of Him in the time of Moses.

Even lifeless creation mourned the death of the Master, and it trembled and was altered out of fear. Yet, even though the Maker of creation was already dead, they pierced Him in His immaculate side, and forthwith came there out Blood and Water. Finally, at about the setting of the sun, Joseph of Arimathea came with Nicodemus (both of them had been secret disciples of Jesus), and they took down the all-holy Body of the Teacher from the Cross and anointed it with aromatic spices, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. When they had buried Him in a new tomb, they rolled a great stone over its entrance.

Cherubic Hymn, the special hymn of Great Thursday is chanted:

Of Thy Mystic Supper, O Son of God, receive me today as a communicant; for I will not speak of the Mystery to Thine enemies; nor will I give Thee a kiss as did Judas; but like the thief do I confess Thee: Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom.

This hymn is also chanted before and during Communion.

In many cathedral cities where there is a bishop the ceremony of "the washing of the feet" is often kept. At the end of the Liturgy, the Book of Gospels is carried to the middle of the cathedral. Then the bishop, in full vestments, comes out of the Sanctuary and takes his seat on a raised platform. He is followed by twelve priests who sit six at each side of him. They represent the twelve Apostles. Two deacons bring out a basin, a vessel of water and a towel. After some prayers, the first deacon reads the Gospel narrative of how our Saviour arose at the Mystical Supper, took off His upper garment, tied a towel round His waist and washed the disciples' feet. While this is read, the bishop rises, takes off his vestments, keeping only the sticharion and the belt, ties the towel round his waist, takes up the basin and washes the feet of each priest. He goes down one row and up the other till he comes to the senior priest, who represents Saint Peter. Here the deacon stops reading. The priest rises and repeats Saint Peter's words: "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" The bishop answers in our Saviour's words and they repeat the scene till the bishop washes "Peter's" feet. Then the bishop puts on his vestments and reads our Saviour's words why He, their Lord and Master, had done this humble service to His disciples: "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." This ceremony is very ancient and reminds us more clearly of the lesson given us by our Lord Jesus Christ: that no service is too lowly for those who would truly follow in His steps.

## HOLY AND GREAT FRIDAY

The whole narration of our Lord's Passion is given at the Matins of Holy and Great Friday. It is commonly called "the Service of the Twelve Gospels" or the "Service of the Holy Passion." After the Six Psalms and the Great Litany, the choir chants, "Alleluia" and the Troparion of Holy and Great Thursday. The priest and deacon come out of the sanctuary carrying the Book of Gospels. It is placed on a podium and the priest begins the readings. The whole story of our Lord's Passion is read from the four evangelists and is divided into twelve parts. It begins with the "Gospel of the Testament" and the prayer at the Mystical Supper in Saint John's Gospel and continues through the four Gospels to the burial of Christ by Joseph of Arimathea. After the fifth reading and before the narrative of the crucifixion in the sixth, a crucifix is solemnly placed in the center of the temple for veneration. After each reading the choir chants, "Glory to Thy long-suffering, O Lord, glory to Thee." Between the readings special antiphons and hymns are chanted which speak of Judas' betrayal; of the cruelty of the Jews; of our Saviour's infinite patience and meekness, and His divine instruction and commandments; of the awe of all creation when the Lord of all was nailed to the Cross between two thieves. In awe and trembling, we stand before the Cross on which our Saviour died. The canon has only three odes. Our Lord's Passion is set forth before us together with the expectation of the glory of the Resurrection. Matins ends shortly after the twelfth Gospel.

During the Service of Matins we hear some of the most compunctionate hymns of the ecclesiastical year. The following are but a few examples:

### *Fourth Tone*

Thou didst ransom us from the curse of the Law by Thy precious Blood. Nailed to the Cross and pierced with the

lance, Thou didst pour forth immortality for men. O our Saviour, glory be to Thee.

### *Plagal of Second Tone*

Today there is hung upon the Tree, He that suspended the earth upon the waters. A crown of thorns is placed upon Him Who is the King of the Angels. With false purple is He wrapped about, He that wrappeth the Heavens with clouds. Buffetings did He receive, Who freed Adam in the Jordan. With nails was He affixed, He that is the Bridegroom of the Church. With a lance was He pierced, He that is the Son of the Virgin. We worship Thy Passion, O Christ. Show also unto us Thy glorious Resurrection.

### *Third Tone*

Two evils hath Israel, my first-born son, committed: He forsook Me, the Source of the water of life, and he dug for himself a broken well; he crucified Me upon the Tree, and asked for Barabbas and released him. Heaven was astonished at this, and the sun hid its rays; but thou, O Israel, wast not ashamed, but didst deliver Me up to death. Forgive them, O holy Father, for they know not what they have done.

Every member of Thy holy Flesh endured dishonour for us; Thy head, the thorns; Thy face, the spittings; Thy cheeks, the smitings; Thy mouth, the taste of vinegar mingled with gall; Thine ears, the impious blasphemies; Thy back, the lash; Thy hand, the reed; the whole length of Thy body, the stretching upon the Cross; Thy joints, the nails; and Thy side, the spear. O Thou Who didst endure the Passion for us, and from the passions didst set us free, and didst condescend to us in Thy love for men and raise us up, O Almighty Saviour, have mercy on us.